

Quotations and Commentary on Awakening

(for the High Holidays)

by Rabbi Debra Orenstein

Awakening & Repentance

1. One who covers up his sins will not prosper, but one who admits and abandons them will receive mercy. – Proverbs 28:13
Reflect: (How) do denial and cover-up aggravate sin, in your experience as both the sinner and the one sinned against? Again, in your experience, (how) do admission and cessation foster mercy?
2. Better open rebuke than hidden love. –Proverbs 27:5
Reflect: Which do you prefer? Which awakens you more?
3. There are offenses that close the way to repentance. [One is] hating rebukes... — *Hilchot Teshuvah*
Reflect: What else do you block out when you avoid rebukes? Is there a way to deliver – and receive – rebukes and criticism that makes them more likely to succeed?
4. "When a man or woman shall commit any sin that people commit, to do a trespass against Adonai, and that person be guilty, then they shall confess their sin which they have done." (Numbers 5:6-7); this means confess in words, and this confession is an affirmative precept. How does one confess? The penitent says, "I beseech You, God, I have sinned. I have acted perversely. I have transgressed before You by doing such and so. I repent and am ashamed of my deeds, and I will never do this again." The fuller and more detailed the confession, the more praiseworthy.— *Hilchot Teshuvah*
Reflect: (How) could the apologies you give benefit from this teaching? Are you fully aware and awakened to the harm your transgressions have caused –for you, for others, and in your relationship with Divinity? Do you share the details of your awareness with people you may have hurt?
5. Rav Huna said in the name of Rav: 'Once a person has committed a transgression once or twice, it becomes permitted to him.' Permitted? How could that come into your mind? Rather, it *appears* to him like something permitted. – Talmud Yoma 87a
Reflect: Is there anything you do – or omit doing – that used to give you pause, and no longer does? Does that change represent growth or backsliding?
6. Let not the notion...pass through your mind that at the beginning of a person's existence, the Almighty decrees that one is to be either righteous or wicked. This is not so. Every human being may become righteous like Moses, or wicked like Jeroboam, wise or foolish, stingy or generous, and so with all qualities. — *Hilchot Teshuvah*
Reflect: What do you wish to be? Awaken to that possibility and to your calling.
7. A person should always regard oneself as if death were imminent and think "I might die this very hour while still in a state of sin." Therefore, repent of your sins immediately and don't say, "When I grow old I will repent," for you may die before becoming old. — *Hilchot Teshuvah*
Reflect: How do – or how might – death and mortality awaken you?

Awakening & Forgiveness

1. It is necessary that everyone, throughout the year, regard oneself as if half-innocent and half-guilty, and regard the whole of humanity as if half-innocent and half-guilty.... —*Hilchot Teshuvah*

Reflect: Awaken to your pre-judgment (also called prejudice). Do you tend to be sure that you are right? that the other guy is wrong? that you yourself are more wrong than right? What if each of us were worthy *and* unworthy, full of good deeds *and* full of bad deeds. What would we then ask of ourselves and each other?
2. It is forbidden for a person to be cruel and refuse to be appeased. Rather, [you] should be easily pacified and difficult to anger. When the person who has wronged [you] asks for forgiveness, [you] should forgive him with a whole heart and a willing spirit. Even if [the other] aggravated and sinned against [you] greatly, [you] should not take revenge, nor bear a grudge. —*Hilchot Tehsuvah*

Reflect: How easily, quickly, and completely do you forgive? How might you improve?
3. Even after making compensation, the wrongdoer must appease the one who was injured and ask forgiveness, and even if the injured party was only annoyed by words. If, however, the injured party is unwilling to forgive, then let the sinner [come three times and ask sincerely for forgiveness]. If the offended person continues to be stubborn, leave them alone and go away. The one who refused to forgive is now the sinner. But if the offended person was the offender's teacher, the pupil has to go back even a thousand times. —*Hilchot Tehsuvah*

Reflect: Do you demand that others jump through hoops to receive your forgiveness? Do you make some people “pay their dues” and “put in their time” before you forgive? Are you equally resistant (or forgiving) with others and with yourself? Are there people whose gift to you has been so great that, no matter what they do, you want and need to be generous with them?
4. When Rabbi Zera had any complaint against any man, he would repeatedly pass by him, showing himself to him, so that [the other] might come forth to apologize. —Talmud Yoma 87a

Reflect: Do you avoid or seek out people who have offended you? How might you approach them better, in order to reconcile?
5. Master of the universe, I hereby forgive anyone who has angered or antagonized me or sinned against me—whether against my body, my property, my honor, or against anything of mine; whether accidentally or willfully, carelessly or purposely; whether through deed, speech, thought, or notion; whether in this lifetime or in another life. I forgive every Jew. May no one be punished on my account. May it be Your will, Adonai, my God and the God of my ancestors, that I may sin no more. Whatever sins I have done before You, may You blot out in Your abundant mercies (but not through the atonement of suffering). May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart, be acceptable to You, God, my Rock and my Redeemer. --the traditional prayer and preface, recited before the bedtime shema

Reflect: As you read these words, do you mean them and/or do they awaken in you an awareness that you are hurt and withholding? Who would you have to be to mean these words 100%? Who might you become if you recited these words every day for a year?

Awakening to God's World

1. My wife is a novelist. Her first novel, *This Flower Blooms Every Hundred Years*, was a record of every vacation she had ever taken in her life. She decided on this as a narrative strategy because she realized that when you are on vacation, you are subject to neither the conventions and habits of the place you are visiting, nor the conventions and habits of the place you have left. That's why we love vacations so. Free of convention and habit, we are flush with our experience. Things seem vivid and fresh. Life stops rushing by beneath our radar screen and we actually begin to feel it. —Rabbi Alan Lew, *Be Still and Get Going: A Jewish Meditation Practice for Real Life*.
Reflect: We say in the morning prayers, “God renews Creation each day.” How can you, in turn, renew your vision of Creation each day in 5769?
2. Hear your Father, your King, the Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe, saying to you:
A tourist has a greater appreciation for what others take for granted.
A tourist realizes that s/he must see and do as much as possible in the short amount of time to be spent in a specific place.
A tourist can get along with much less than someone who views him/herself as a permanent resident.
A tourist doesn't take too seriously anything that's going on in the place that s/he is visiting. S/he realizes that s/he will not be there very long, so s/he can overlook things that might irritate or distress others.
A tourist knows that s/he will soon be going home. Bear this in mind, and make the most of your visit to this planet. —Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, *My Father, My King: Connecting with the Creator*
Reflect: How might you choose to be a tourist (vs. a permanent resident) this year?